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THE GNOSTIC AND HELLENISTIC BACKGROUNDS OF *SOPHIA* IN 1 CORINTHIANS 1-4

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ABSTRACT. First Corinthians 1-4 discusses the concept of *sophia* or wisdom as a central theme. It seems to be both a worldly standard by which the Corinthians judged their teachers and a concept which Paul redefines in light of the cross. Over the last century, two major proposals have been put forth as an explanation for the background of *sophia*: Gnosticism and Hellenistic Jewish wisdom. Those who advance the hypothesis of Gnosticism behind the concept, correctly identify in these chapters words and terminology that are commonly associated with Gnosticism. However, the literary context of 1 Corinthians 1-4, as determinative of meaning for these words, suggests different meanings associated with the cross. Moreover, claiming Gnostic influence on the writing of 1 Corinthians is guilty of anachronism. The Hellenistic Jewish wisdom proposal is likewise based on alleged linguistic and conceptual parallelism with Philonic type wisdom. It is argued, among other things, that the Corinthians were taught such wisdom by Apollos. This argument, however cannot be sustained, when we look at Apollos' ministry in light of the information we have in the New Testament. As a result, both Gnosticism and Hellenistic Jewish wisdom are not viable hypothesis for the background of *sophia*.

KEY WORDS: Sophia, Corinthians, Gnosticism, Hellenistic Jewish wisdom, Apollos, Paul

Introduction

The first epistle to the Corinthians is well known to provide answers and solutions to some issues that were present in the Corinthian church. The first of these is the issue of dissensions. A quick perusal of the first four chapters will show that the issue of dissensions is the result of different groups within the church esteeming differently the ones ministering to them. Central to this estimation is the topic of *sophia* or 'wisdom', as can be seen from the number of times this term occurs in these beginning chapters of the letter. Paul responds to this value of wisdom that the Corinthians seem to have valued in the estimation of their teachers.

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This article will seek to probe into the question of the background behind the concept of wisdom that the Corinthians so highly esteemed and that caused them to have preferences among teachers. More specifically, this article will evaluate the Gnostic and Hellenistic Jewish wisdom proposals for the background of *sophia*. The evidence will show that neither of these proposed backgrounds is behind the term and concept of *sophia* that Paul repudiates in his argument against dissensions. In this article, we will limit our purpose to dismantling and disproving such proposals, another study having to be conducted in order to propose a more probable background for the concept of *sophia*.

Gnosticism

The claim that the Corinthians held to a Gnostic belief is a by-product of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* as represented particularly by Bultmann and the discoveries of the Nag Hammadi texts in the late 1940s (Dunn 1995:34). The works of two scholars in particular have shaped subsequent debate over the origins of Gnosticism and its influence especially in Corinth: Ulrich Wilckens and Walter Schmithals.

Wilckens' position is argued in his monograph *Weisheit und Torheit,* where the discussion revolves around the development of the Gnostic Sophia myth. This myth was the main tenet of Valentinian Gnosticism, but Wilckens argues that it had roots that predate Christianity (e.g., 1 Enoch 42). He sees this myth as underlying Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16. This text, according to Wilckens, presents the idea of the descent of the heavenly Redeemer through the realms of the *archontes* who gives spiritual wisdom to God's people. The most provocative aspect of his argument is that in this text Paul seeks to critique the Corinthians' Gnostic wisdom by using their terminology, but ironically, in exposing his own view he actually puts forth the Corinthians' own position with which he essentially agrees (Wilckens 1959: 216f). In other words, Paul got too carried away with his Gnostic parody to the point of sounding Gnostic himself, and for good reasons, argues Wilckens: Paul actually shared many ideas with the Gnostics.

Schmithals brought the Gnostic thesis to its full expression in his dissertation *Die Gnosis in Corinth*, written under Bultmann. Like Wilckens, Schmithals sees a developed Jewish Gnosticism behind the Corinthian wisdom and an appropriation by Paul of the Corinthians' Gnostic terminology (Schmithals 1956: 152-55). In distinction from Wilckens, Schmithals describes the Christ as a suffering revealer rather than as a redemptive Messiah (Schmithals 1956: 138-41). Both, however, base their arguments especially on the terminology in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, so that any evaluation of a Gnostic background must begin with an explanation of these terms.

Some of the terminology that presumably provides prime evidence of early Gnostic thought in 1 Corinthians is as follows. First, the advocates of a Gnostic background tend to associate *gnōsis* with *sophia*. In this regard, the Gnostic Corinthians, it is argued, were boasting of a higher knowledge and wisdom against those lacking them (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:1ff) (Schmithals 1956: 229). The term *gnōsis*, thus, is taken in a technical sense, referring both to form and content. Second, it is argued that this esoteric knowledge belonging to an elite group of Christians is clearly seen in the distinction between two classes of Christians—*teleiois pneumatikois* and *nēpiois* (Wilckens 1959: 52-96). This distinction, it is argued, is supported by the use of the term *mystēriov* (Wilckens 1959: 206). Thus, only the upper echelons of Christians have the capacity to apprehend deeper and more mysterious teaching, something that the Gnostics also preached. Thirdly, it is argued that *pneumatikois* is a key term of identification in later Gnosticism which presumably proves that the Corinthians regarding themselves as *pneumatikois* is evidence that they held to a Gnostic teaching. *In nuce*, the constellation of these terms in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, terms used also by Gnostics, seemingly proves that the Corinthians (and Paul by his appropriation of them) were holding to Gnostic teaching. The argument that the background of this passage is Gnostic is apparently strengthened by the use of 1 Corinthians 2:9 in the seventeenth saying of the Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas*, as if to suggest that the authors of such Gnostic writings regarded 1 Corinthians as a source of Gnostic teachings (Collins 1995: 17).

To this use of these terms in an allegedly Gnostic sense in 1 Corinthians 2:6-3:1 two types of response are in order. First, the literary context is determinative of meaning. The context and not the presuppositions of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* must guide one's exegesis and search into the meaning of these terms as used by Paul in this passage. Just because many terms used by Paul are also present in Gnostic writings, does not guarantee that these different contexts give the terms similar meanings (Thiselton 2000: 226, 240, 269). Terms do not have meanings in isolation but in relation to each other, their semantic content being dependent on their context and frame of reference. Thus, while Hans Conzelmann favors a distinction of classes in 1 Corinthians 2:6-3:1, he rightly states that, 'The position in Corinth cannot be reconstructed on the basis of the possibility of the general history of religion… Certainty attaches only to what we can learn from the text' (Conzelmann 1975: 15). The Gnostic hypothesis will prove to be an imposition upon the text that distorts the natural meaning of these terms in their context. But what is the natural meaning of these words as determined by the literary context?

The passage that allegedly contains a constellation of Gnostic terms (i.e., 1 Corinthians 2:6-16), seeks to explain two ways of relating to the wisdom

proclaimed by Paul. Since from the beginning of his argument Paul has been working with contrasts between the world and Christians, it is hard to see Paul switching to distinctions between Christians in this passage, as the advocates of a Gnostic background argue (Fee 1987: 99-100). Paul is still speaking about divine wisdom, which is unacceptable to the world. As such, he speaks of mystery, which we have identified with the wisdom of God and the cross, *vis-à-vis* the world. It is the world with its system of values that cannot and will not accept the wisdom of God. The reason Paul gives is because such mystery can be known only by revelation through the agency of God's Spirit. Only those who have the Spirit of God (i.e., *pneumatikois*) can perceive the wisdom of God. But, as Fee argues, 'The gift of the Spirit does not lead to special status among believers; rather, it leads to special status *vis-à-vis* the world' (Fee 1987: 120). Therefore, while it may be correct to associate *gnōsis* with *sophia* and to argue that *sophia* in this passage refers to both form and content, *sophia* refers not to a Gnostic, esoteric knowledge that differentiates between classes of Christians, but to the proclamation of the cross that makes an eschatological distinction between Christians and unbelievers. In this respect, the context clearly shows that the unbelieving Jewish leaders (i.e., *archontes* cf. Acts 13:27) were the paradigmatic example of the rejection of Christ by the world as a result of their ignorance in reference to the mystery of God. Given this literary context and the continuity of Paul's argument, this explanation of these terms seems to be the most natural reading, rendering a Gnostic interpretation unnecessary (Conzelmann 1975: 15).

In summary, then, the insight gained from the exegesis of these terms in their immediate context shows that they are not used in a Gnostic sense, but that another explanation is more probable. We will corroborate this conclusion with a second response to the Gnostic hypothesis which derives from a short analysis of Gnosticism, allegedly Gnostic technical terms, and its assumed influence on the Corinthians (and Paul). The question that must be answered and has been answered definitively is whether it is legitimate to speak of Gnosticism in Paul's time.

It is generally accepted today that a distinction must be made between Gnosticism as it defines the Gnostic systems which first emerged in the second century and the 'gnosis' or 'proto-gnosticism' with its trends and tendencies in a Gnostic direction which should be used for the earlier period (Dunn 1995: 36). Therefore, 'the continued use of the term "gnosticism" (or 'Gnosticism') with reference to the Corinthian church may simply be anachronistic and misleading' (Idem). Robert McLachlan Wilson, who is known for his early critique of a Gnostic hypothesis behind 1 Corinthians, agrees by stating that what is happening in postulating a Gnostic background for 1 Corinthians is a 'reading [of the] first-century documents with

second-century spectacles' (Wilson 1982: 109). In order to see clearly that a Gnostic hypothesis is unnecessary to explaining 1 Corinthians 2:6-3:1, he points to the distinction between two directions of approaching the issue. He explains:

> Those who begin with the developed Gnosticism of the second century and go back to Paul's letters have no difficulty in identifying 'gnostic motifs'—terms, concepts and ideas which may legitimately be described as Gnostic because they are used as technical terms in the context of Gnostic systems. This usage however may be question-begging, since there is no way of showing that these terms and concepts are *already* Gnostic in an earlier context… Those who begin at the other end can interpret such terms and concepts without reference to Gnosticism—only to find themselves at a loss to explain how and why this new significance should so suddenly be given to them (Wilson 1982: 103).

This quotation from Wilson points to two important aspects that do away with an assumed necessary Gnostic background behind 1 Corinthians. First, the mere use by Paul of terms that later became technical terms in Gnosticism does not betray a Gnostic presence in 1 Corinthians. C. K. Barrett's statement that *gnōsis* 'is most often used in a plain, non-technical, sense', has been universally accepted in most recent scholarship (Barrett 1996: 37). Thus, even a proto-gnostic hypothesis is improbable in light of the fact that the terms are used in a non-technical way by Paul.

Second, just because a Gnostic book such as *Gospel of Thomas* quotes from 1 Corinthians, this does not render 1 Corinthians (or Paul) Gnostic. In fact, as Painter rightly states, 'The use of this language does not in itself prove gnostic influence as it is possible that Paul's language influenced the development of later Gnosticism' (Painter 1982: 240). Wilson expounds on this idea:

> The similarities are certainly present, but when we examine each in its context, in Paul on the one hand and in the Gnostic literature on the other, then the differences emerge. Since the Gnostics admittedly appealed to Paul, the inference is that they are the borrowers [not the other way around], and that the material has undergone some *Umdeutung* at their hands. To prove Gnostic influence on Paul (or his opponents) we should require to find independent evidence for the existence of something which could be clearly recognized as Gnosticism in the background of Paul's ministry (Wilson 1982: 109).

The analysis of both the immediate context and of (proto-) Gnosticism in Paul's day has shown that a Gnostic hypothesis is not viable. And if this is the case, then one also cannot claim that Paul speaks as a Gnostic in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16. As Scroggs argues, such a claim would 'reduce the first two chapters to an argument which would have been completely incoherent to

the Corinthians' (Scroggs 1967-68: 33). Therefore, another background to the language of *sophia* must be sought that gives a more plausible explanation of the data.

Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom

Another candidate for the background of *sophia* esteemed by the Corinthians is that of Hellenistic Jewish wisdom traditions. As with the advocates of a Gnostic background, so also those who see Jewish wisdom traditions behind the language of *sophia* in the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians start with the terminology of 2:6-3:4, more precisely with the contrast *pneumatikois* vs. *psychikois* and its relation to wisdom. It is argued that these two terms are labels for two distinct spiritual classes of Christians, not much different from what the Gnostic hypothesis claims. And this is not a surprise, since the category of proto-Gnosticism is very general, covering various early theological systems, and there are parallels between Philo's exegesis, for instance, and that of the later Gnostics (Sterling 1995: 383-84). Among those who maintain such levels of spirituality based on the pair *pneumatikois* vs. *psychikois* as evidenced in the Jewish wisdom traditions are Birger A. Pearson, Richard A. Horsley, and James A. Davis.

Pearson, in his monograph *The Pneumatikos-Psychikos Terminology in 1 Corinthians*, seeks to locate the source of the Corinthians' theology embedded in the contrast of *pneumatikois* with *psychikois* in Hellenistic Jewish exegesis of Genesis 2:7. This dualism brings out the sharp distinction between the higher and heavenly *pneuma* or *pneumatikos* nature of man, and the lower and earthly *psychē* or *psychikos* nature of man (Pearson 1973: 19-20, 82). In consequence, according to the Jewish wisdom traditions represented by Philo and the Wisdom of Solomon, *sophia* is the determinative factor in establishing one's level of spirituality—*pneumatikos* or *psychikos* (Pearson 1973: 39). Paul's task, then, was to redefine the meaning of *pneumatikos* and its relation to *sophia*. Pearson summarizes his investigation in this way:

> It has been determined that Paul, in 1 Corinthians 2:1-16, has skillfully used the language of his opponents, and has turned it back against them by interpreting their language in an apocalyptic fashion. In doing so, Paul has not succumbed to the theology of his opponents, but has substituted his own concept of 'wisdom' for that of his opponents. Using their terminology, he has robbed them of their claim to *sapientia propria*, and has stressed in contrast that the true wisdom, which is 'foolishness' for men governed by the values of this world, is a *sapientia aliena*, given by God to man by the Spirit, and whose content is simply: the word of the cross. Thus, there is no ground for boasting at all. The Christian is *simul sapiens et stultus* (Pearson 1973: 41-42).

Horsley in several articles has attempted to refine the earlier thesis of Pearson arguing that, 'It is possible to determine with some degree of precision the nature and the background of the "proto-gnosticism" in Corinth: Hellenistic Jewish religiosity focused on Sophia and *gnosis*' (Horsley 1981: 32) He challenges Pearson by noting that there is no distinction between the higher and lower parts of the soul in Wisdom of Solomon and Philo. More importantly, he argues that, 'For this distinctive language [*pneumatikois* vs. *psychikois*] so important for understanding the Corinthian situation there is no convincing terminological parallel whatsoever in contemporary comparative material' (Horsley 1976: 270).

Nevertheless, Horsley contends that this contrast is parallel, on the one hand, to the fundamental contrast between the heavenly (immortal) and earthly (mortal) man of 1 Corinthians 15:44-54, and on the other hand to two other contrasts in the context of 1 Corinthians 2: mature vs. infant and wise vs. foolish (Horsley: 274-80 and 280-84, respectively). Thus, Horsley argues, though the *pneumatikois* vs. *psychikois* terminology is missing in Philo, the conceptual parallels are there, particularly in Philo's exegesis of Genesis 1:27 and 2:7a (Horsley 1976: 288). This means that the Philonic theology is present in Corinth. He states: 'It would appear that the Corinthians used *pneumatikos-psychikos* along with the rest of these terms to make the same basic contrast between people of different levels of spiritual ability and attainment, different religious types of people, for whom the heavenly *anthrōpos* and the earthly *anthrōpos* were paradigmatic symbols in Philo' (Horsley 1976: 280). For both the distinction is determined by the possession of *sophia*, as both the content and the agent of salvation (Horsley 1976: 288). This Philonic theology, Horsley contends, was mediated through an eloquent interpreter, such as Apollos, based on his Alexandrian origin (cf. Acts 18:24-28) (Horsley 1977: 231).

While both Pearson and Horsley focus essentially on finding linguistic and conceptual parallels between the Corinthians' wisdom and Hellenistic Jewish Wisdom traditions as found in Philo and Wisdom of Solomon, James Davis, in his monograph *Wisdom and Spirit*, provides a more comprehensive treatment of the background behind the wisdom language. He includes Palestinian Jewish wisdom traditions as found in Sirach and Qumran in seeking to reveal the relation between *sophia* and *pneumatikos* (Davis 1984: 142). Two aspects distinguish Davis from his predecessors: the identification of the Corinthian wisdom with Torah meditation and the significant role of the Spirit's assistance in attaining wisdom via Torah study (Davis 1984: 7-62, 122). According to Davis, three features of Jewish wisdom traditions were present in Corinth: (1) a nomistic emphasis seen in the identification of spiritual wisdom with the investigation of the meaning of Torah (Davis 1984: 103, 124); (2) a tendency to distinguish between individuals at different lev-

els with respect to the acquisition and attainment of wisdom (Davis 1984: 75); and (3) a stress upon eloquence as a quality of the *pneumatikois* (Davis 1984: 128, 143). These three features are tied together by the role of the Spirit. The Spirit is regarded as the source of higher wisdom and assists the ones who are part of an elite group to become pneumatics as they study the Torah. Davis concludes:

> In both Hellenistic and Palestinian Judaism we found that the content of wisdom is defined with respect to the Torah; there is discussion about levels of attainment with regard to the acquisition of wisdom; the mediation of wisdom at the highest level of sapiential achievement is consistently attributed to a spirit sent by God, or to God's own Spirit; and qualities such as eloquence and perfection are throughout our sources assigned to the person who has successfully attained to the wisdom and understanding brought by divine assistance (Davis 1984: 142).

Like Pearson and Horsley, Davis argues that the Corinthians had embraced a Philonic type of wisdom, perhaps under the influence of Apollos. In light of this reconstruction of the background, Paul critiques this nomistic wisdom for the reason of its low estimate of the cross and argues that the Torah-wisdom is inadequate and therefore superseded by the wisdom given by the Spirit as a result of the Christ-event (Davis 1984: 104, 106, 143).

From the succinct presentation of the Jewish wisdom hypothesis, it is evident that the various linguistic and conceptual parallels from chronologically plausible sources recommend this hypothesis over Gnosticism. Moreover, it provides a possible answer to the question of the avenues by which such theological traditions may have been introduced in the Corinthian church—Apollos. But the claim that Apollos was the expositor of Jewish wisdom based on study of the Torah is going beyond the evidence found in Acts 18:24-28 and represents a very improbable theory in light of the fact that the Corinthian correspondence lacks any indication in that direction (Ker 2000: 79). Litfin is right to state that 'the easy relationship between Paul and Apollos would have been inconceivable if Apollos had taught Philonic doctrines to the Corinthians and thereby become the source of Paul's problems in Corinth' (Litfin 1994: 231). In fact, the argument concerning the connection of Apollos with the Hellenistic Jewish wisdom background in 1 Corinthians seems to be based on a circular argument—it seeks to prove (i.e., Apollos introduced Torah-wisdom in Corinth) that which it assumes (i.e., Apollos embraced a Hellenistic Jewish teaching).

G. Robert Wynne, in his 1912 monograph on Apollos, very aptly remarks: 'There is no reason to think that the teaching of St. Paul and of Apollos varied seriously… The censure of St. Paul was not addressed to any false doctrine taught by his successor [Apollos], but to those who recklessly endangered unity by this blind favoritism' (Wynne 1912: 59-60). That this is

so is evidenced by what Luke tells us in Acts about Apollos. First, he 'was instructed in the way of the Lord', that is, in the way of Jesus (Acts 18:25). Second, Aquila and Priscilla completed whatever was lacking in his Christian knowledge (Acts 18:26), so that if he did use to teach a different doctrine (though this is seriously doubtful) he received proper instructions in theology. Third, he was sent with letters of recommendation to Corinth (Acts 18:27), something the 'brothers' (including Aquila and Priscilla) would not have done had they suspected him to teach differently from Paul. And fourth, Luke tells us that he 'helped them [i.e., the Corinthians] much which had believed through grace' (Acts 18:27), something Luke would not have written had Apollos introduced in Corinth a teaching different from Paul's gospel of Christ crucified. All these suggest strongly that Apollos did not have a different doctrine or teaching than that of the church, and consequently of Paul, much less one based on Jewish wisdom traditions. That he was *dynatos en tais graphais* (cf. Acts 18:24) does not single him out necessarily, since preaching in the early church (viz. Acts) implied great knowledge of the Old Testament which served for proving the messianic character of Jesus. Similarly, his origin from Alexandria, and presumably an acquaintance with Philonic exegesis, does not require that he indeed was influenced by Jewish wisdom traditions or that, had he been, he continued to use it after his 'discipleship training' under Aquila and Priscilla (Barrett 1982: 4).

Nevertheless, the hypothesis of Hellenistic Jewish wisdom is not dependent upon this conjecture about Apollos, and thus other weaknesses must be explored. Moreover, if the main pillars upon which the hypothesis rests are proven weak, the speculation concerning Apollos will also crumble, remaining at the stage of being a mere conjecture.

The Jewish wisdom background seems to rely heavily upon two premises that need evaluation. First, all advocates argue that the distinction between *pneumatikos* vs. *psychikos* finds its linguistic and conceptual parallel particularly in Philo and Wisdom of Solomon, which allegedly proves that the Corinthians adopted a Jewish Wisdom theology. Similar distinctions in levels of spirituality were observed concerning the Gnostic hypothesis, and we do not need to repeat the critique lodged there based on contextual considerations and on the logical flow of the argument (Pickett 1997: 51). One issue, however, still needs to be addressed, namely the degree to which it is legitimate to read the Corinthians' theology into Paul's terminology. Various positions have already been briefly mentioned, but a preference needs to be identified.

It is quite obvious that the Corinthians' thinking was characterized by worldly values as identified in the phrase *sophian tou kosmou* or *tou aiōnos toutou*. They even considered themselves *sophois*. Paul seeks to challenge this

wisdom by presenting a different wisdom—represented by the cross, a wisdom he preaches to the *pneumatikois*. Pearson's distinction between two levels of Christians forces him to argue '[t]hat Paul here states that this "wisdom" is reserved for the "perfect" is pure irony, for in fact Paul elsewhere stresses that the secrets of God's salvific plan belong to the entire congregation of the elect' (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:3f) (Pearson 1973: 32). The context, however, does not require that we see in Paul's statement an irony but a fact, considering our arguments that Paul identifies the *pneumatikois* with all Christians (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:1-3) and that the wisdom/mystery he preaches is Christ crucified (not a 'mystery' for any believer). That the Corinthians might have regarded themselves *pneumatikois*, a term carrying a theological baggage different than the one Paul implies by its use, is a moot point in this text. In this respect, we believe that the terminology used by Paul is not something that he borrowed from his opponents, since it is part of his vocabulary in describing believers (cf. Galatians 6:1). E. A. Judge states:

> Whereas in other respects (for example in the field of personal relations and the ministries in church) Paul is very ready to forge his own vocabulary, here he by no means concedes their terms to his opponents. Wisdom (*sophia*), reason (*logos*), and knowledge (*gnosis*) are all ideals central to his own position. He stigmatizes what is invalid in the case of others by qualifying the terms with phrases such as 'of the world' or 'according to the flesh' (Judge 1983: 11).

Thus, as we have argued, what Paul challenges in 1 Corinthians 2:6-3:4 is not a certain theology but a worldly mindset. Scroggs rightly argues, 'I think it doubtful that very much evidence of the *content* of the opponents' wisdom can be found anywhere in chapters 1-4' (Scroggs 1967-68: 34). Paul uses the contrast between *pneumatikos* and *psychikos* not for the purpose of classifying the Corinthians as second-class Christians, maintaining the class distinctions present in Jewish wisdom traditions, but to warn them of their precarious spiritual state given their worldly thinking concerning Christian leadership.

A second major premise of this hypothesis is that the *sophia* against which Paul polemicizes should be identified with the Torah interpretations of the Jewish wisdom traditions. In other words, Paul challenges the Corinthians' alleged theology based on the study of Torah. This reconstruction, however, is questionable, not the least because the Corinthian *ekklēsia* was predominantly a Gentile congregation (Ker 2000: 80). Also, William Baird, in his review of Davis' monograph, rightly asks, 'If the real distinction between Paul and his opponents is their stress on the Torah and his focus on Christ and the cross, how are we to explain the shape of the apostle's argument? Why, for instance, does Paul fail completely to mention the law in 1 Corin-

thians 1:18-3:17', and why other vocabulary he uses elsewhere to denigrate reliance on the law (such as 'works of the law') is missing? (Baird 1987: 150). Thus, it is difficult to detect any diatribe against the law in 1 Corinthians 1-4 or anywhere else in 1 Corinthians. On the contrary, Paul seems to regard the requirements of the Law as neutral (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23) (Tuckett 1994: 209). More importantly, the Corinthians do not seem to be overly concerned with Torah-morality, given their immoral behavior (Lamp 2000: 101-2).

Given these weaknesses, the hypothesis of Jewish wisdom traditions behind the *sophia* language in 1 Corinthians 1:18-3:4 remains at the level of a hypothesis. Moreover, the linguistic and conceptual parallels do not seem to suggest that their presence in our text necessarily means an importation of the theology of the Jewish wisdom context. The argument of this hypothesis is much too limited for a discussion of these affinities, and there is virtually no mention of other background issues such as social and cultural factors that would contribute to its validity (Clarke 1993: 102, n.68).

Conclusion

The concept of *sophia* seems to be central both in the Corinthians' minds as they evaluated their teachers and in Paul's argument against the dissensions present in the Corinthian church. We have shown that the alleged backgrounds of Gnosticism and Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom for the concept of *sophia* cannot be proven. They are proposed hypothesis that cannot gather enough evidence from the content of Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 1-4. Therefore, a different background must be sought for this concept, but that is the topic of another study.

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